**Type of Contribution: STUDENT SHOWCASE PROPOSAL**

**Online information behavior of older adults: facilitating information access**

**Keywords:** information needs, older adults, online information seeking behavior, user experience

# Introduction

### The proportion of senior citizens (usually defined as aged 60 or 65 and over) is expanding in the population of countries all over the world, leading to the expectation that this particular group of population should have growing importance from a research perspective (Williamson and Asla, 2009). The number of people using computers and the Internet is on the constant rise as well and it is fair to say that in many cases older adults are extremely fast growing group of computer and Internet users (Wagner, Hassanein and Head, 2010).

### Therefore, as the size of the senior population increases and people are living longer, the demand for information on how to navigate and cope with issues faced in later life is expected to increase (Brossoie, Karen, Willis-Walton and Reynolds, 2010).

### The latest census (2011) in Croatia shows that 24 per cent of population belongs to the age-group of 60+, whereas only 21 per cent belongs to those under 19 year of age (Statistical Yearbook, 2017, p. 107, 109). Due to substantially increasing number of older adults in Croatia it is crucial to consider them as valid users of online information and many institutions that provide information interesting to them (newspaper agencies, libraries, medical institutions, etc.) should consider their information needs as well as the natural physical and cognitive changes that come with old age and prevents them from using the online information as younger generations. In order to facilitate information access for older adults, authors of this paper created web application “[Senior.hr](http://it.ffos.hr/nastava20152016/cvidakovic/senior.hr/index.php)”.

**2. Theoretical framework**

Previous research has shown that older adults, in most cases, search information regarding health, medications (Tinker, McCreadie, Salvage, 1993) banking, transportation, shopping and physical activities (Wagner; Hassanein; Head, 2010). The same is true when they use computers and the Internet in order to find information – most common areas are health information, education and productivity, including mental stimulation (Rosenthal, 2008).

Older adults also, due to natural physical and cognitive changes that accompany their old age, have different needs and concerns when it comes to using the computers and the Internet. Therefore, older adults require customized web application interface for online research. In order to facilitate their research, web application interfaces should have larger fonts, sound navigation, icons which require less precise clicking. Furthermore, cognitive changes such as decreased concentration, memory reduction and lack of interest demand an interface which is simplified, with less distractions and which is appropriate for senior citizens (Wagner, Hassanein and Head, 2010).

**3. Methodology and research questions**

The aim of this paper is to learn about information needs, information behavior and obstacles to acquiring information of older adults in Osijek who use the Internet to find necessary information with the end-goal of creating the simpler, older adults'-friendly web application which serves as a gateway to their most frequently used information sources on the Internet.

During Spring 2018 authors conducted ten short semi-structured interviews with attendees of Information technology course held in City and University Library in Osijek using the critical-incident technique. All attendees were older than sixty years. The interview questions dealt with information needs of our respondents, type of online information sources they use, obstacles they encounter while searching online, ways of learning about online information sources, and most frequently used online information sources.

Interviews were followed by three simulated search tasks. The simulated search tasks addressed respondents' ability to find medical/health information, local news information, and information about the loan of a recent bestseller from the local library. Through the think-aloud method respondents were asked to verbally account all their thoughts while searching for the information to solve the simulated search tasks. Those tasks gave us insight into the thought process of our respondents and revealed problem areas for their retrieving the required information*.*

During Summer 2019 authors created older adults'-friendly web application “[Senior.hr](http://it.ffos.hr/nastava20152016/cvidakovic/senior.hr/index.php)” and conducted usability study with the help of ten older adult citizens in order to receive feedback about the web application. While conducting usability study, older adults were asked to find the same information as in previous simulated search tasks in Spring 2018, but this time older adults used web application “[Senior.hr](http://it.ffos.hr/nastava20152016/cvidakovic/senior.hr/index.php)” to find the information.

**4. Concluding discussion**

Key point of this paper is to present older adults'-friendly web application "[Senior.hr](http://it.ffos.hr/nastava20152016/cvidakovic/senior.hr/index.php)" and point out results of usability study conducted among ten older adults from Osijek.

The obtained results showed that older adults are much faster to obtain the necessary information using the "[Senior.hr](http://it.ffos.hr/nastava20152016/cvidakovic/senior.hr/index.php)" web application than using the Internet search engines, where they enter information queries and thus search for the necessary information. In order to make the web application more useful over time, it is necessary to increase the sample of research and increase the content of the application in the form of instructions for use of various social networks and other web applications that interest senior citizens.

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